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ABSTRACT

In Washington, D.C. in September 1968, because there were no after-school programs where the staff took responsibility for the children, the National Capital Area Child Day Care Association set up a demonstration program. This report provides an anecdotal record of the program's development. Two rooms were secured in the basement of a school, 50 black, underprivileged first and second graders were selected, and a small staff was hired. The staff included a teacher-in-charge, two assistant teachers, two aides, and a clerk. The initial goals were to keep the child safe, to improve his self-image, to develop his expressive and creative abilities, to work on remedial academic work, and to offer supplementary nourishment in the form of daily snacks. The teacher-in-charge involved the children in projects and trips and encouraged them to learn through doing. However, the problems were many: staffing, inexperience, lack of intra-staff communication, disturbed children, vandalism, and inability to lose the feeling of being intruders in the basement rooms. The program is still in the testing phase but some progress has been made in solving these problems. (MH)

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NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA
CHILD DAY CARE ASSOCIATION, INC.

## The Story of an After - School Program

Some of the problems and headaches encountered in a demonstration after - school program in Washington, D.C. run by the National Capital Area Child Day Care Association. Thomas C. Taylor, Executive Director; written by Virginia Street, Director of Education. (From a speech delivered at the National Association Education of Young Children conference in Salt Lake City, Utah)

In September 1968, Washington, D.C. the Nation's Capital had no accountable after school programs. By "accountable" I mean that there were no programs where staff took responsibility for the child. There were some school clubs, some tutorial programs, some recreation programs where the child could go and come as he pleased. Schools mostly stand empty after three o'clock, locked up tight. The only city program of any magnitude is run by the Recreation Department. We asked our day care parents what was wrong with it, why didn't their elementary children go from school to the nearest recreation program? The answer came loud and clear.

"1. There is no accountability; the parents are not sure the children would stay in the recreation center.
2. Staff do not know how to control children; so they run wild and unsupervised.
3. Center staff itself is poorly supervised so recreation staff often sit in the office not doing much.
4. Ratio of staff to children is woefully inadequate.
5. Program is designed for teenagers and not for younger children.

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6. Equipment is scarce, not sufficient for any kind of a program and disappears rapidly.
7. Mothers not only don't use the centers but are frightened to send small children because the centers are overrun by rough teenage boys."

I suspect this is not only the story of Washington's underfunded recreation program but of any other large city which attempts a recreation program.

The Junior League of Washington, D.C. to its credit, came up with $50,000 and contracted with our Day Care Association to run a two year demonstration program for after school children. We picked a public school in the far southeast section of the city located next to public housing and across from one of our Day Care Centers.

Permission was granted by school authorities to use two rooms in the basement from three to six p.m. We hired a young, gifted teacher by the name of Jacalynn Fox fresh out of Vassar, whom we had watched teach the previous summer. She became teacher-in-charge. She had had marvelous training at Vassar; she hadn't taken one education course and she knew a lot about kids! She was hired for six hours a day. The idea was that she would visit parents and plan program during the hours she wasn't actually teaching. She should have been hired for eight hours; she worked them anyway. We decided to do fifty kids, twenty-five in each room. The rest of the teaching staff was to be two assistant teachers and two aides who worked three hours a day initially. We also had a clerk for six hours. We planned daily snacks, loaded with protein and fruit (things they might not get at home).

To keep the ages fairly homogeneous we asked the school to assign us first and second graders who were most in need of after school care. The principal told us the whole school needed care. It was finally agreed that the teachers would assign to our program five children from each first and second grade section.

Our goals showed we meant well. We would keep the child safe, work on his self image, help him to express himself, help him become creative, do what ever academic remedial work needed to be done to enrich the school's academic program, co-operating closely with the public school teacher. We would have lots of out door play and plenty of trips. We knew all our children would be black so we planned trips to see black professionals in important positions. Indeed so far, the children have met an architect, physisist, dramatist, doctor, nurse, banker, and store owner. In each case the person talked to the children about his profession in simple terms. Miss Fox is also working at a black studies program on a simplified scale.

Miss Fox had come to my attention because of the way she had worked up a lesson for our day care kids starting with a rusty bed spring. With her after school program she did the same kind of teaching. She told me of a walk in the city - "See the different kinds of stores - here's a cleaners, there's a laundromat. What's the difference? Here's a printer's shop." Here, they went inside and found a nice owner who showed them around. They went in the grocery store. "What's that? And that? What color is it?" She gave the children some money - they bought a pumpkin - they got a receipt, lots of talk - they made a jack-o-lantern - planted the seeds to

see if they would root - dried other seeds to eat - cooked pumpkin meat (these boys love to cook) made a candle - melting wax in a double boiler - talked about what was happening - did experiments with flame and heat - jar over candle - not enough oxygen - flame goes out, and so forth. This ended up being a six day unplanned lesson every bit of it on the spot relevant. When this young lady is working with children you could shoot off a rocket in the room and the kids wouldn't look up. That gives you a taste of the kind of thing we are doing with the kids when we have them. All are the same old things we do to help kids start to really think.

Now for the waves, which at one point nearly capsized the program. The problems of staffing were incredible. We interviewed about fifty young college people and selected two who had experience with children and two who wanted to learn, to make up a staff of five with Miss Fox acting as leader. We paid $2.00 an hour to the aides and $2.50 to the assistant teachers. This is good hourly pay in Washington, but the hitch is we only paid for three hours a day. The fact of life is that college students in Washington need more than three hours of work a day to support themselves and the lovely idea of working in the afternoon with us and going to school in the morning just plain didn't work. By Christmas time we had lost all but one staff member. What's more replacements also left almost as soon as hired. Jackie's careful orientations were wasted.

The second glaring problem was that none of our staff except Jackie were experienced teachers and had a difficult time controlling or interesting the children. Many times, when I went to watch the program - (the children by then had been divided in groups with

each adult assigned nine or ten kids) every group would fall apart except Jackie's. The kids would start to ham it up- dash around, etc. The idea of having inexperienced college kids, because they are cheap, run an after school program is a disaster.

The third fookish thing we had done was to allow no planning time, so communication between staff and teacher-in-charge was by phone or she tried to hold Saturday morning sessions which the staff did on their own time. That is some did. Others never got there.

The fourth problem was the kinds of kids who were assigned to the program by the public school teachers. They were asked to recommend those who most needed care. They turned out to be also those who were loaded with problems. To say they were "acting out" kids is a pale understatement. To add to the picture the school had no recesses in winter and some of the children would get to us after having stood in the corner two hours. Its not hard to imagine what the children were like when they got to us. At that point we had no consultative help built into the program.

The other unpleasant things that happened had to do with logistics. The rooms we were assigned in the school had no doors leading directly outside, so a main door had to be used. This had to be open so parents could pick up their kids. Of course older kids came in, in some cases vandalized the building and often harrassed our teachers and kids. It was scary but at least, it lead to the school giving us a room with an outside door and a bathroom of its' own. This helped as we could keep kids contained and not lose them in the halls.

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Another problem which we have never really solved is some way to give our after - school kids a sense of "this is ours". Sharing a room meant we could never decorate it, put paintings up, leave block buildings overnight, or have large on-going projects. I wish some architect would design some walls that are two faced or panels that could be turned and design a vandal proof but attractive, large storage unit. We lost a couple of hundred dollars worth of equipment and the dreariness of the basement school rooms with a few irrelevant French posters on the walls was deeply depressing.

Jackie came to me about Christmas time at the end of her rope, ready to give up. In January 1969 we redesigned the program. First, we redid the budget which was supposed to finance two summers and two winters to make it two winters and one summer. Next, we hired a talented social worker to help us decide whether we should drop some of the wildest of the kids, and in any event see if she could help us cope with them. We put in two hours of planning time a week raising the working hours of staff from fifteen to seventeen hours a week. The few children who dropped out we did not replace.

In the fall of 1969 we beefed up the program further. We put the clerk in the classroom and made her a teacher's aide as she had some experience, a second experienced teacher and increased the working hours of the staff to twenty hours a week. We also dropped the number of children to forty making the ratio of children to adults six or seven to one. We also asked the school not to send us all acting out kids, but let us have some children who needed drawing out. It worked! The atmosphere in the classroom this year is very different; kids are busy; staff is relaxed. The staff is

now relatively stable. The twelve wild ones from last year who continued this year are easier to handle. Our social worker left and was replaced by a child psychiatrist who helps us with these kids and their myriad problems.

Our last hang up surfaced this fall. We had a lot of trouble recruiting children as the public school teachers did not want their children attending our after school program as it made the children "too independent". However we got our full compliment of children more or less by hook or crook; we also have some older sibs that come to help, because they want to.

So much for our agonies. What are the kids like that we are dealing with? What is our particular disadvantaged child like? Sometimes I awake at night and try to figure out what it would be like to be never spoken to by name for days at a time. Our children come from big families, with mothers who work, distraught from trying to make ends meet, usually without a man in the house. Rats, roaches, broken glass, overruning garbage cans, drunks, house breakers, molesters, dope peddlars are everyday things. Add to this the lethal rush of city automobile traffic, to underline the fact that danger is a way of life to the inner city child.

Miss Fox has visited all the homes, some several times. Most of the mothers are out-spoken about hating the neighborhood, wishing they could get out and fearful for their children. There are no pictures on the walls but religious ones; radio, record player and T.V. are on at once with no one listening. The streets are monotonously the same, even though there are flowers occasionally, the total effect is overwhelmed by trash and broken glass. It seems

to have had the curious effect on our children of producing "tunnel vision" to quote Miss Fox. "They don't notice things. When I say 'what can you tell me about those flowers' they rarely respond in terms of color. When we stand under a tree and then stand out in the hot sun I can't get the children to feel the difference in temperature. Except for a few children who are lucky enough to get sent off to grandparents in the country in the summer time, they are unable to conceive of anything being different from where they are." On a trip to a different part of the city they exclaim at all the white people they see. Anything different from their own world is absolutely unreal because they have never known anything else. These same children in some of the first grades are still using the "Dick and Jane" Reader series of the picket fence, pretty suburbs and blond white kids. It's an absolute miracle to me that any of them learn to read; many don't.

Because they have built up no trust in anyone, it is very hard for the children to take turns, to wait for anything; most of them hit and grab. Of course. There are other children who are worse, Miss Fox says. They quietly go without things; don't speak up; staff discovers with a jolt that Jane didn't get her piece of cake. Jane, and the others like her, feel they don't deserve a piece of cake. Some can even verbalize "I'm no good." "I can't."

Many children have never had a baseball thrown to them, many cannot use scissors, or a pencil.

O.K. these are our children and as we stumble along with our program we keep asking ourselves-knowing what we know now if we were starting all over again; what would we do? One theory we have turned

around in our heads is not to have the children in large groups after school. They are with groups all day, they need a friend, a place to go, a time to themselves. The social worker we had with us the first year used to ask kids when she was getting to know them, what was the most important thing in their lives. The most frequent answer was mother, Miss Fox and the after school snacks in that order.

Perhaps we ought to train day care mothers to sit down with school children, have a snack ready to share. She would encourage the child to have a friend in, for a little quiet T.V. or talk. This line of reasoning comes from our realization that what our child needs most is a relationship - an adult he can trust. Someone who can build up his faith in himself. We are still <u>not</u> sure this isn't the best answer, but it would take some extensive training of day care mothers and weekly supervision. I asked one of our day care mothers why she preferred a day care center to a sitter. Listen to this answer. Day care centers were better supervised, personnel better trained some were professional, she liked the educational aspects, she wanted her child to have contacts with males as she had no husband, she wanted to be sure that her child got good food because she could never be sure that her child got the food she herself brought to the sitters or whether the sitters' child got it, she wanted the child to go outside as she knew it was good for him and sitters rarely take kids out, and finally she said she felt good when she knew, and it was easy to tell, that her child had had a full satisfying day; she said she felt less guilty about leaving him and having to work.

One thing is certain that you can't open the schools, pull in some college kids as teachers and expect any kind of after school program to emerge that does anything for inner city children. After school programs need to be mounted with all the care of a quality day care program, with the medical and social working components in tact. (Schools at least in Washington, D.C. are not funded to do very much in these areas. Counciling, because there are so few councilors, concentrates on the oldest children in the school only.) After school teachers need to be professionals and aides should have long orientations.

We will be able to tell you in June 1970 whether our beefed-up program seems to be filling the children's needs. One deeply encouraging straw in the wind was the answer of a little boy to the social worker's question of what he wanted to be when he grew up. He said "an architect", so perhaps we are building in a little core of motivation. Our staff, now all experienced and our ratio of six or seven children to one seems to satisfy our children's craving for attention and acknowledgement. Staff does lots of patting and hugging, again responding to need. We don't care about manners, we can tolerate a lot of noise, children can be themselves. I guess this is what the very middle class teachers object to. Miss Fox feels that her visits to parents have been very productive; the feed back she gets from them has helped her with program. She also says the parents need for a friend, someone to chat with, complain to, is urgent. Her visits to parents seem to reinforce and speed up her ability to get to her child, find out his needs and start helping him. <u>Parents</u> must be woven into any after school program.

To finish with I would like to mention one incident which Miss Fox described to me.

An early day in spring, she decided to take the snack outside. The delighted reaction of a little boy finally getting the idea that the group was going to eat outdoors was something to see. It was totally unreal to him. "Picnic" was a new word and concept, and he kept running back to Miss Fox saying "are we <u>really</u> going to take the food outside?" The picnic was pleasant in the sunn and afterwards Miss Fox showed the children how to put the remains in a paper bag and put it in the trash can. In this process she found that most of the children were familiar with the term "litter" including the little boy.

The implications of this incident makes us angry. Apparently the public schools and our society feel they have done their duty to children if they have lectured to them about the evils of littering. What an insane sense of values. If we don't do anything else for our kids in the after school program we are going to try to put some <u>positive</u> things into their lives which should have been there in the first place. Like a sense of wonder, like the feeling of being taken care of, like its O.K. to be a kid, like some fun, like picnics.